



Loudoun County Sheriff's Office
False Alarm Reduction Unit
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Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a false alarm?

A false alarm is an alarm dispatch request to the Sheriff's Office, when the responding deputy finds no evidence of a criminal offense or attempted criminal offense.

2. Why does the county need a false alarm ordinance?

The Sheriff approached the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors in 2004 and requested an ordinance be put in place to help decrease the number of false alarms because they take deputies away from other essential duties and delay response time to true emergencies. In 2005, deputies responded to nearly 10,000 alarm calls; over 99% of those alarms were false.

3. Have similar false alarm ordinances been successful elsewhere?

Yes. The ordinance is modeled after a similar law in neighboring Montgomery County, Maryland, which saw a nearly 50% decrease in false alarms after it was implemented. Other neighboring counties have seen similar results.

4. Why do I need to fill out a registration form?

The false alarm ordinance requires all commercial and home security alarm systems in the county be registered with the False Alarm Reduction Unit of the Sheriff's Office.

5. How much is the registration fee?

There is no registration fee.

6. When does my registration expire?

An alarm user (residential and commercial) registration shall expire two (2) years from the date of issuance, and must be renewed by submitting an updated application to the alarm administrator prior to expiration. Failure to submit a renewal may result in suspension of response.

An alarm/monitoring company business registration shall expire one (1) year from the date of issuance. Failure to submit a renewal shall place the alarm/monitoring company in violation of this Ordinance and the registration may be revoked.

7. Is a contact person someone other than myself?

A contact person is someone other than the homeowner (i.e., friend or relative) and for a business usually the manager. These individuals should be able and agree to:

- Receive notification of an alarm system activation, and
- Respond to the alarm site within one hour at anytime, and
- Upon request can grant access to the alarm site and deactivate the alarm system if necessary.

8. What happens if I don't register?

A non-registered alarm system will be subject to a \$100 fine for each false alarm in addition to any other fines. The additional fine may be waived for non-registered systems if the alarm user submits an application for registration within five (5) working days after notification of such violation.

9. What is the fee schedule and how does it work?

For each false alarm activation, over two (2) in a calendar year, a fine will be imposed. The 3rd false alarm activation will be billed at \$100. Residential will escalate per false alarm to \$1,000 per alarm for the 15th activation and for each one thereafter. Commercial will escalate per false alarm to \$4,000 per alarm for the 20th activation and each false alarm activation thereafter.

10. What happens if I don't pay the false alarm fee?

If a fine has been imposed and neither a payment nor appeal has been received within thirty (30) days, a notice will be issued that you are subject to being placed on a no-response list. The user shall have ten (10) days to respond to the notice, and if none is forthcoming, you may be placed in a no-response status.

11. What does no-response mean?

Unless there is separate indication that there is a crime in progress, the Sheriff's Office may refuse to respond to an alarm dispatch request at an alarm site for which the alarm registration is revoked.

12. When should I contact my alarm company?

Call your alarm company when:

- you have an unexplained false alarm,
- you get an indoor pet,
- you are about to remodel,
- your phone number changes,
- you want to change your emergency contacts,
- you are moving, or
- you are going to be out of town for an extended period of time.

13. Who gets charged if the alarm company employee sets the alarm off?

The alarm company shall be assessed the fine, if the deputy responding to the alarm determines that an on-site employee of the alarm installation company directly caused the false alarm. In this situation, the false alarm will not be counted against the alarm user.

14. What do I do to get the alarm/monitoring company to call me first?

Put it in writing. Let your monitoring company know that you want them to call you prior to notifying the Sheriff's Office.

15. If the power goes off, is that considered a false alarm?

Power outages or interruption of power should not cause false alarms. Power surges and lightning strikes should not cause false alarms. False alarms caused by lightning strikes are controllable through the proper grounding of alarm systems and the use of power **and** phone line surge suppressors. Use of surge suppressors greatly reduces false alarms by redirecting and dissipating electrical current to the ground.

16. How can backup batteries cause false alarms?

If you have false alarms after a storm, it may not be the storm that caused the alarm. If your batteries are not up to the job, a false alarm may be generated when your alarm system powers up after a power failure caused by a storm. Even a short power failure of a second or less may be long enough to cause a false alarm.

17. How can I reduce the chance that my battery will cause a false alarm?

Like all batteries, your backup has a useful life of about 3 to 5 years, but that life may be shortened if you have had several power outages. Your battery backup should be checked annually, or after any storm related false alarm, by a alarm technician and replaced when needed.

18. Will a deputy always respond to my alarm?

Law enforcement response may be influenced by factors including, but not limited to the availability of Sheriff's Office units, priority of calls, weather conditions, traffic conditions, emergency conditions, staffing levels, etc.

19. Can my alarm registration be transferred to another person or alarm site?

No. An alarm user shall inform the alarm company of any change that alters any of the information listed on the alarm registration application within five (5) business days of such change. The alarm company in turn, has five (5) business days to update this information with the alarm administrator or face possible suspension of response from the Sheriff's Office until the new registration is received by the alarm administrator.

20. How often should I have my system checked?

Annually.

21. What do I do if I accidentally set off the alarm system?

Do not panic! Enter your disarm code carefully to reset your system. Wait for your alarm/monitoring company to call, give your password or ID number. **Do not** leave your home or business until you have talked with your monitoring station. Do not call 911 to cancel an alarm activation. You must call your monitoring station. Review with your alarm/monitoring company the procedures you expect them to follow when an alarm activates. Put your instructions in writing.

22. I bought a house that has an alarm system installed. What do I need to do?

First, ask the previous owner if the system is currently monitored. If it is and you do not intend to secure a monitoring agreement, ensure the previous owners have canceled their service before your phone system is turned on. If you plan on securing a monitoring contract, contact the alarm company for proper training and activation of the system. If this is not done, the monitoring company will not be able to verify your right to be in the home and they will have to request a law enforcement dispatch each time you accidentally set off the system.

Secondly, the previous owner should have provided you with security company information. If not, you will need to contact the security company that installed the system for power-down instructions.

Finally, if the previous owner did not cancel service before moving out, please be advised that you may have to present proof of ownership before the security company will assist you. The security company needs to be sure that they are dealing with a person, who has the legal right to shut the system down, and not a burglar.